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MEG AND THE OTHERS

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

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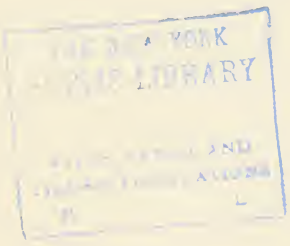
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MARGARET AND BETTY HEAR THE STORY OF LONG AGO MEG.

MEG
AND THE OTHERS

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

ILLUSTRATED BY
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NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
PUBLISHERS

[1906]
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Published, September, 1906

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MEG AND THE OTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

LONG AGO MEG.

BEFORE I introduce you to that little girl, I must tell you how she happened to find her way from the long ago to the time when Margaret and Betty went to visit Sunny Acres. So long had the little girl hid in the past that it is a wonder she ever found her way out; but once she did reach Margaret and Betty, she liked them so well that she decided to stay with them forever and a day, and they found her so exactly like other small girls that they forgot she was old-fashioned, and loved her as I hope you all will.

Now, Margaret and Betty had gone to

stay three months with Grandma and Grandpa Travers while their father and mother went to Europe. They had never been away anywhere alone before, and they felt quite grown up and important. It was such fun to have their own trunks, marked with their own names, and nothing in the trunks but their own things!

Margaret was ten years old and Betty was seven. When they bade mother good-bye at the wharf in New York, she had whispered to Margaret: "Be a brave little mother-sister to Betty. I put her in your charge!" It was a very odd thing to say, Margaret thought; for, with grandfather and grandmother at dear, beautiful Sunny Acres, there would be no call for bravery.

After the big steamer sailed away, Grandfather Travers took his small charges on the train to the pretty New England town, outside of which lay the broad acres of the dear farm. Grandfather never was so funny as he was on that trip. He kept his

two little girls laughing merrily, and finally attracted three other children who were in the parlor car and invited them to join his little granddaughters in a game of "twenty questions." When they reached the station of Greenville it was quite dark, and by the time they drove up to Sunny Acres it was delightfully, and shockingly, late. Grandma was waiting for them and Mammy Liza had a surprise supper for them, and then they were ready for bed. The next thing they knew the sun was peeping through the Swiss curtains and saying in a perfectly beaming way:

"I declare! if here are not those little girls again. And so early in the season, too! They generally fetch up at Christmas."

Just then Betty heard Major Proudfoot, the Spanish rooster, crow under the window, as much as to say:

"Is this true that I hear? Have my two old friends come back?"

Out of bed Betty crept in her long, white gown. Sure enough, there was the major, very grand and portly, looking up inquiringly; and around him a perfect crowd of new and old acquaintances from the chicken yard. Betty clasped her hands in rapture and whispered a good morning to the company below. Then she called Margaret. She had to share the bliss!

"Oh, Margaret," she said, "do wake up and see here. Major Proudfoot has come to call us, and there is a herd of chickies with him!" So, of course, Margaret woke up and that was the beginning of a happy day.

There was so much to do. All the animals to visit and pet! Mammy Liza to talk to from the kitchen piazza, upon which were served, every few minutes, dainties from closet or oven. Then there was grandma to hug and whisper secrets to, and later in the day a drive with grandpa as he went upon his rounds. Grandpa was

a doctor and it was fun to go calling with him, for everyone loved him; and, unless there was some one very ill, he was the jolliest of companions. At six o'clock the good supper was served in the "sunset window" of the dining room; and it did seem that first, beautiful evening, that the sun could not bear to say good night and go to bed. But at last it did; and the soft curtain of evening fell between him and two little girls who, strangely enough, grew suddenly very quiet and serious.

After supper grandfather went to his "den" to read and rest until eight o'clock. Grandmother knitted by the grate fire—for it was a bit chilly—in the library, and in between times took a "wink or two." It was wonderful to see grandma knit. She could do it with her eyes shut. Her pretty white hands flew fast and sure, and if by chance any foolish stitch thought it could "drop" out of line, it soon found its mistake, for open would come grandma's eyes

at once; and with a little jab she had the mischievous loop on her needle and in its place.

That first evening Margaret and Betty watched her solemnly, until they saw the dear hands let fall the crimson wool.

"She's napping," whispered Margaret, and she led Betty, tiptoeing, over to the window.

"What kind of a day is it going to be to-morrow?" she said.

"I—I don't know!" answered Betty, in a queer, little voice.

The wind was rising; it shook the tall trees and made them cast long, black shadows.

"I—I suppose daddy and mommy are—all right?" quivered that funny voice; "I don't suppose this wind could wreck them?" Then two little sighs fluttered out into the night. One belonged to Betty, and the other—did not.

"I wonder," here Betty gulped; "I

wonder if they are—lonely without us? It would be awful for them!"

Then, quick as a flash, Margaret knew what mother had meant when she bade her be a brave mother-sister. She flung back her shoulders, and put her arm around Betty.

"Don't talk like that!" she faltered; "you might make yourself homesick, you know."

Just then, from the fireside, came a cheerful call:

"Dearies, do come here! I have such a plan!"

Two little forms ran to the bidding.

"I've been thinking," said grandma.

"We thought you were winking!" suggested Betty.

"The idea!" scoffed grandma. "Cannot a person slip into the land behind the eyelids to get a hint or two, without being suspected of anything so commonplace as winks? In that happy country I saw a

little girl. I saw her, oh! so plainly. Guess how she looked?"

This was fun. Margaret and Betty nestled on the rug at grandma's feet and began to guess. They knew that she would lead them on. It was easy enough to guess when grandma went before.

"She was pretty—kind of," cautiously ventured Margaret, "and she had curls and lived—oh, I do hope she lived long ago."

"What a wizard you are!" exclaimed grandma, "you are almost right. She did live long ago; but the curls,—dear me, how she wanted curls, but her hair was quite straight!"

"Never mind!" soothed Betty. "I like shiny, straight hair best. I hope she was sometimes good, and sometimes naughty like us. Girls who are always good make me feel queer."

"This one was about half and half," laughed grandma, "and now you must guess what she wore."

"If she lived long ago," mused Margaret, "I guess that she had a funny little, short, straight waist, long skirt and queer little shoes without heels."

"You certainly are a witch," cried grandma, raising her hands in surprise. "Now Betty must name this girl. Anything you fancy, dear."

"I like Margaret the best of all," smiled Betty; "it is your name and mother's name and my Margaret's; besides, it's easy and homey."

"Very well," nodded grandma, "but let us call her Meg for short. All Margarets are Megs when you get very intimate, and I imagine we shall get very intimate with this little friend."

There was a clapping of hands, and Margaret and Betty and dear grandma seemed to see a quaint little figure sitting quite prim and proper by the fire's glow. Out from the past she had come to bear them company, and all they had

to do was to find out just how delightful she was.

"We're ready," cried Betty, nestling against grandma's knee. "I can hardly wait."

"I think," grandma began, "that we will begin when Meg began first to think. It will show just what kind of a young person she was."

One day, before she could walk, she was sitting on the floor in a big, sunny room. Some one had cut a great paper doll of tissue paper and hung it in a doorway. The breeze swayed it to and fro, and made it look very queer. Meg stared at it; opened her big, brown eyes; put her dimpled hands on her fat knees and began to think. That was the beginning of things with her. After that, whenever she saw anything, she thought about it. That big, dancing object was not like the people in Meg's world; it was different. She was not afraid; oh! no. But she was content

to sit and blink at it. While the strange thing danced, the baby girl was happy; when the breeze swayed it too far, her eyes opened wider. It certainly was interesting! Just as things were most thrilling, the Boy came in. He lived next door—five miles away. He had come visiting with his mother. The Boy had been walking all alone for two long months. He could go very fast, indeed, without toppling over, and he put on airs and said things that no one but his mother and himself understood. Meg was envious of the Boy and longed to ask him how he learned to go alone; but she was too proud; she contented herself by watching him, when he was not looking, and sometimes trying to stagger to her own fat legs. Once she had done it! but no one ever knew; she had fallen down promptly and every one wondered how she had got the big lump on the back of her head. After that fall Meg had decided that for the rest of her life she

would go on all fours! It was too high and tippery when you stood on just two things.

Well, while Meg sat watching the strange, new object dangling in the doorway, in toddled the Boy. He saw the object, too, but he never wasted time thinking—he did things. With a gurgle he ran to it and cried: "Catchie! catchie!" He did not say it very plain, but everyone laughed.

Then a dreadful thing happened. The Boy did catchie! catchie! He caught the swaying figure by the leg and down it came bringing joy and mystery with it!

Meg's eyes grew wide in alarm and anger. She saw the Boy making off with his prize. She forgot all about herself, she forgot the bump on the back of her head; she got right upon her fat, little legs; steadied herself and ran; really, truly, ran after the Boy.

No one spoke; no one dared to. On went Meg like a little fury. Her hands were extended, and her indignant eyes fixed

upon the Boy. A moment more and she clutched him, and then she cried out, quite loudly:

"Catchie! catchie!"

Down went the Boy all in a heap. He had never been frightened before in all his life, but he was frightened now. Every one laughed but him; he set up a wail that filled the room. Meg grasped the paper doll, paid no heed to the Boy's trouble, but sat down comfortably and investigated her conquest.

She was never going to forget how to get up and run. She was not that kind of girl; besides you got what you wanted if you had the free use of your hands! Grandma Travers stopped and smiled.

"I am sure I am going to like that Meg!" cried Margaret. "She begins brave."

"And I am so glad there is going to be a boy," whispered Betty; "I've always noticed that if there is a boy there is fun."

"Well," said grandma, "every evening,

between supper hour and eight o'clock we will try to get this dear little Meg to visit with us."

"But at eight o'clock," laughed some one from the doorway, "I am coming for a romp. I want to get exercise." It was Grandpa Travers. Margaret and Betty made a dash for him.

"To-night," growled grandpa, just like a live bear, "I am after two young owls, whose eyes are too bright. Away with you, you wiseacres! Twice down the hall, once through the kitchen, then up the stairs, and woe to the last leg on the top step!"

Off they went, shouting with glee. Twice down the hall, through Mammy Liza's kitchen and out again, and would you believe it, there was not one single leg on the top step of the stairs! There were four, all in a tangle, and the great, growling bear caught them and undid the snarls, and sent two rosy little girls off to bed and happy dreams.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN MEG WAS OLDER.

AND now (began Grandma Travers) our Meg is older. She is just the kind of girl that she was when a baby. She thought a great many things, and she made believe all by herself. She had no playmates but the Boy, and, as he lived five miles away, she did not see him often. She liked him very much and believed everything he said. He said a great many strange things, but Meg never questioned them. Sometimes he and she played "Miss Jinny Jones" together, and every once in awhile, during the play, the Boy would laugh until the tears rolled down his round, red cheeks. He always saw something comical in the play, but it was earnest

enough to Meg. The Boy never laughed when they played hide-and-seek. He said that was different. He taught Meg to climb and take a fall without a cry. He made queer faces at her if she felt dizzy when she cut herself. Indeed the Boy expected a good deal of Meg, and she rarely disappointed him. But when she was alone she played and thought things that, had the Boy guessed them, would have made him stare. That other life was Meg's real life. She played with the Boy and tried to please him,—by herself, she lived!

The family on the big farm were such busy folks that they did not imagine that inside of queer little Meg was a girl they did not know at all. Besides, Grandma Thompson, who lived at the farm, did not believe in noticing and spoiling children; she thought it better to train them to ask no questions, obey without explanations, and make as little noise as possible when

they were with grown-ups. The busy, tired father and mother remembered that grandma had brought up a large family that way with fairly good results ; so they thought she knew best. Now you can see that it was impossible for poor Meg to tell anyone about that other lovely life of hers. She just went inside of it, shut every one else away, and was not the outside Meg at all. This went along quite happily until the day about which I am going to tell you. The day with a shadow.

It was odd, but Meg had never forgotten that first big paper doll. It was the pattern for a number of other comforting dollies that she made herself, for no one ever had thought it necessary to buy her one.

First Meg had found out that a bottle with an apron tied around the neck looked something like the paper wonder. So Meg had two bottle dolls named Rebecca and Jane. The bottles were exactly alike, but every feature and expression was different

to the loving little mother. Up in the attic, a big packing box made a lovely playhouse. It was off in the corner by a tiny window, all so cosy and homey, and in the roof, overhead, was a knot hole that let in a bit of sky, or a drop of rain, and added to the joy of the attic world. There Meg and Rebecca and Jane lived a glorious existence. From the door of the big box they went a-traveling into strange lands; but always the same dear sky shone through the knot hole, and guided the giddy little travelers back. There were parties and weddings; and smiles and tears, in the packing case mansion, and that life was the real one; the life downstairs was the make-believe, and only to be endured on account of meal-time and the white bed by mother's. Of course, the outside life in the garden was delightful, and the visits of the Boy were bright spots, but the attic life was Meg's very own and it was perfect. After awhile Rebecca and Jane had three new

companions. They were known below stairs as "long necked squashes"; under the knot hole they were Susan, Amelia and Martha Ann. Dressed in bits of discarded calicoes, they became sacred creatures, and Meg could see their tender eyes and smiling mouths. So distinctly did she see those dear faces, that one day in a breathless ecstacy, she painted eyes, noses and mouths on Susan, Amelia and Martha Ann, with elderberry juice, and that made them real and even more exquisite. In a mad moment Meg took them downstairs and laid them on the woodhouse roof to dry, and when she went to find them they were gone! A terrible fear grew in the little heart as she ran into the kitchen where mother and grandmother were making pies.

"Where are Susan, Amelia and Martha Ann?" she panted, quite forgetting she was in the make-believe life.

"Whatever is the matter with you?" cried mother in alarm. "Have you been in

the sun too long?" But Meg did not answer; she was turning over a pan of yellow parings in a wild heedless fashion, and at last she saw a round black eye and an arched eyebrow; and further on a tender, smiling mouth.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she sobbed. "You have made pies of them! Oh! oh! oh!" Then out of the kitchen she ran and hid herself under a big bush in the garden and wept sadly for the dear children who were so lovely, and had been so cruelly sacrificed. How long she lay there Meg never knew, but voices aroused her at last, and she peeped out.

Cheap Johnny was at the kitchen door, and grandmother and mother were bargaining with him. Once a year he came with a big basket filled with all sorts of things of value to women on a lonely farm. There were dress lengths, pins, needles, cotton and ribbons. Sometimes there were little stockings and shoes of finer make than

could be got in the village. Once mother had bought Meg a pair of little bronze slippers and blue stockings. She had not worn them often, but they were great comforts lying on the table near the little bed.

Just as Meg looked from her bush mother said: "John, come into the kitchen and have some dinner. Leave your basket there. You look tired out."

John went in and mother blew the horn for father and the men and then called, "Margaret, dinner is ready!" Meg made no answer and mother turned, saying: "When she gets over her tantrum she will come fast enough." Then there was silence for a moment until father and the men came and passed inside. At last Meg was alone with Cheap Johnny's basket! She meant no harm, she only wanted to peep with no one to say, "Do not touch." She wanted to look at the bright ribbons and fancy how dear they would be in the world upstairs. Slowly she crept to the

basket and there, right on top, lay a thing that set even the make-believe world a-whirling.

A doll, a really truly one! The first one Meg had ever seen. It lay right on its stiff little sawdust back, its china arms and legs tied close; its radiant china face, with heavenly blue eyes, turned to greet the eager brown ones looking down!

Meg dropped beside the basket and gasped. Then she clasped her hands together and said: "Oh!" with a long, sweet sigh of supreme bliss. She had never wanted anything so much in her life as she wanted that doll! but mother gave money for Johnny's things and poor Meg had never had a penny of her own—or wanted it until then.

She would just hold the doll a minute! Just feel the precious form. Reverently she took it from its nest among the calicoes and ribbons. Oh, the blessedness of the feeling of ownership—if only for a moment!

"I'll take it under the bush just for another kiss!" whispered Meg, kissing again and again the rosy, china face. Under the bush minutes flew and then—oh! horror! out came Cheap Johnny, all thanks and bows, and he covered the basket with the shiny black oilcloth and, strapping it across his back, he actually started down the lane! Meg grew cold with fright and hugged the treasure to her beating heart. Should she run and give the doll back? She dared not. Cheap Johnny would call her—what did they call people who took things that did not belong to them? And what became of such people?

Meg knew the shortest Commandments and there was one, "Thou shalt not steal!" She grew sick as she remembered what grandmother had told her about that Commandment.

By this time Cheap Johnny was out of sight, and it was too late to run after him. There was but one thing to do. Go to the

attic and see if the fear would grow less up there. Strange things often happened in the attic.

Like a little ghost Meg crept through the quiet house and up to the packing case mansion.

Yes; up there her heart grew light and the burden of wrong fell away. The warm September sky looked as tenderly through the knot hole as if a good child were huddled in the playhouse with her first dolly in her arms, instead of—well, there were no awful things in the attic world, nor any cruel names.

Meg rocked back and forth, crooning to the beautiful dolly. In all her life she had never been so happy. Everything was forgotten but the joy of knowing that at last she wanted nothing else on earth.

Meg lived lives and lives for two happy hours; then steps sounded on the stairs, and the feeling of fright came back with the steps. Hurriedly the doll was hidden under

the sheltering robes of Rebecca and Jane, and, with white face, Meg awaited her doom.

Was it Cheap Johnny coming to—to— No! it was Grandma Thompson with a stern look upon her face.

"Margaret?"

"Yes'm."

"So you're here. Are you sulking over nothing?"

"No'm."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing, ma'am."

There was a painful pause, then:

"You are a very stubborn child. You may stay here until you can come downstairs and act like yourself. And remember this, Margaret, the eye of God is upon you."

She was gone. Then Meg looked up. No longer did the smiling autumn day look through the knot hole. A grim grayness was in its place. "The eye of God!" Meg repeated, and, sure enough, the hole did look like an eye; the longer Meg

gazed at it the more it seemed to look like an eye. Perhaps God knew all about her naughtiness and was never, never going to let her be happy in her own little world again!

You see, children were not taught as gently and lovingly then as now, and poor Meg grew very sad. Would that eye always watch her, and make her remember that she had done wrong?

When the shadows began to fall little Meg crept down the attic stairs looking very white and pitiful.

"I'm—I'm going to act like myself," she quivered to her mother, who was getting the nicest supper that ever was; and something in the little face made the mother pause and kiss the drooping lips.

Meg could barely eat a mouthful of the lovely supper, for her throat felt choky and hard.

Grandma Travers stopped and looked down at the two listeners at her knee.

"Why!" she smiled, "I declare, there is a tear and a half between you!"

"I am sorry for poor Meg," faltered Betty.

"And so am I," echoed Margaret; "it wasn't like a speaking story to-night, grandma, dear. I felt just as if I were reading it myself. Where is grandpa, I wonder? The clock struck eight a long time ago."

"Here I am," cried a jolly voice. "I had to stop and wipe two tears and a half away, for I heard a bit about that poor little Meg. I declare she was a sad young imp, but one can but like her. Which shall it be, a scamper to-night, or a dignified procession of wild animals?"

"Wild animals," said Betty.

"And let's go slow," added Margaret, for she was still thinking of Meg who could not eat the nicest supper that ever was.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER McNAMARA.

ALL through the next day Margaret and Betty thought and talked of Meg. She seemed like a familiar little friend and they were anxious to see her well out of her trouble.

"Of course something will happen to make it all right," said Margaret, "or she never could eat. It's queer how your throat acts when you've got a secret of that kind."

"Yes," nodded Betty, comprehendingly. "You remember the time we ate the candy all up, and told mamma it must have been Fido because we saw his feet marks?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, her cheeks growing red; "I nearly died every time I

looked at Fido until after we had told mamma."

Well, the day was very happy. Grandpa took them on his round when he went to see the sick folks, and no one was very sick, so he was jolly and made jokes all the time.

Then Mammy Liza had a fine supper for them, which she said was flavored with "hunger sarse," though Betty could not find it anywhere, and then came the story hour by the bright grate fire, while the autumn wind whistled outside as if it, too, were eager to hear about Meg of Long Ago.

"I suppose," began grandma, that you will want to know how Meg came through her trouble?"

"Yes!" said both little girls at once, "we can hardly wait."

Well, poor Meg had a restless night, and her mother was afraid she was going to be ill, but when morning came the first

thing Meg asked was, that she might go and see the Boy.

"She's lonely," thought mother; and, as the father was going to market to the town ten miles away, it was decided that he should take Meg along and drop her at the Boy's house until he should return at evening.

When it was all arranged Meg stole upstairs and took the beautiful dolly in her arms. One long, loving look she gave it, then wrapped it in an old shawl and put it under the seat in the wagon while no one was looking.

When they got to the Boy's house Meg's father went in to explain, and while he was gone Meg took the dolly and a bundle containing an apron to wear over her best dress, and clambered down. Just then the Boy came shouting out of the house and dragged Meg around in a circle, while he told her they were to go nutting and have no end of fun. No one could be

gloomy where the Boy was ; he was like a fine northwest wind; he just made you glad no matter how queer your heart was. At last the two set forth, with a big luncheon in a basket that was to be used later for carrying nuts home.

"What have you got in that bundle?" asked the Boy, when they were near the woods ; "it looks like a sausage." Meg colored deeply and hung her head. Perhaps you will think it odd—Meg thought so herself—but in this trouble there was no one in the world to whom she felt she could go but to the Boy. She was going to tell him all about it ! There was a cosy looking stump at the entrance of the woods, and upon that the two sat down. "What's up?" asked the Boy, for Meg's face was tragic.

"I—I—have stolen something!" gasped Meg. The Boy jumped.

"What was it?" he whispered, for he was too manly to risk even the squirrels hearing.

"This." And with that Meg unrolled her bundle and the dear, innocent doll lay exposed to the astonished eyes of the Boy.

"Jiminy!" he began, "what a—" He paused. After all, this was no joke.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"I took it from Cheap Johnny." Then, because the Boy was a boy he laughed. It seemed so funny for big, rough Cheap Johnny to have that sort of thing!

But Meg, now that she had begun, went wildly on and soon the Boy grew quite serious and quiet, but he did not draw away from her—Meg noticed that; he even sat a little closer to her on the stump.

"And now," sighed Meg, at the end of the pitiful little story, "what shall I do? Just what you say, I will do. You always know the way out."

The Boy grew red under his freckles at this praise, but at last he blurted:

"I don't know how to get you out of—of this hole!" His face was very sad, and

poor Meg began to cry wistfully. They sat still for a little while; the Boy was thinking, and Meg was trying to dry her eyes; but the tears would keep running down.

Presently the Boy had an inspiration.

"I tell you," he cried excitedly, "we'll go to Father McNamara's! Michael goes there and tells him things. Michael says it helps."

"Father McNamara? Michael?" gasped Meg. "Who are they?"

"Michael is father's new man," explained the Boy, "and Father McNamara is a kind old priest, who lives at the Corners. He's something like a minister, only different. If you tell him things he always tries to help you—or show you how to help yourself. I do not understand—but I think we might try—perhaps he could help us." The Boy said "us," and, oh! how it comforted Meg.

"Let's eat first," continued the Boy, "the Corners are not far. Goody me! just see what a lot of things mother put in!"

Now, when a little girl has not eaten much in two days, she is apt to feel pretty hungry, especially if she is out in the crisp September air. No trouble can smother such an appetite; so Meg ate her full share and the Boy told funny stories, and, except for the dear doll lying in the old shawl, all would have been jolly.

When the last morsel was divided and eaten, the Boy jumped up and cried energetically, "Come along Meg, if we want to gather any nuts, we've got to get you straight, so hurry!"

Meg took up her lovely burden and followed the Boy. Through the wood path they went, and so came to the Corners, where stood the little store and post office, the white Methodist church and the smaller brown Catholic chapel; nestling close to it was Father McNamara's tiny house. Meg had never seen the priest, and she was woefully afraid of what he might be. The Boy had never seen him, either, but he was not

afraid. He had only been afraid once in his life and that was when Meg first ran after him.

The Boy knocked boldly at the door of the brown house, and a deep, kindly voice called: "Come in!" And in walked the two. A smiling old man sat in a big chair before a table upon which lay, open, a book.

The golden sunlight streaming through the wide window, made the old man's snowy hair glisten beautifully.

"Well, well," he laughed, as he spied the dignified boy leading the pale little girl by the hand, "who is coming to see me to-day, to be sure?"

"Please, sir," began the Boy eagerly; "this is Meg. She wants to tell you something. Our Michael says you help people and I—we—I thought maybe you would tell Meg how to be happy."

The old man did not smile now, but a wonderfully tender look crept into the kindly eyes.

"Come here, dear child!" a large hand was extended toward Meg. She grasped it, and was drawn to the knee of the new friend.

"Now, little girl, you may tell me all about it. I will help you if I can. I am fond of little girls."

It seemed the simplest thing to tell the sad story. The boy stood silently waiting; surely there was nothing to fear from this friendly man. Meg raised her troubled eyes to the mild face and whispered, "I loved it so!"

"Yes, dear child, go on."

"And, and, indeed, sir, I meant no harm at first—it—it just came."

"Exactly. And then?"

"Why, then, it was awful!" A pause, then out came the story with a rush like a summer shower that is sure to be followed by sunshine, "and, sir, here it is!" The smiling doll lay in Father McNamara's hands.

"Ah!" said he, nodding gently; "it is

MEG AND THE BOY VISIT FATHER McNAMARA.

very pretty, to be sure, and it might mean much to a lonely little girl—if it had come the right way. But, my child, we can never be happy with pleasures that are not rightfully ours."

"No, sir!" A long, shuddering sigh came with the words.

"You wish to do all that you can to set things right, my child?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Even to giving up this—this pretty thing?"

Meg gave the doll a long, loving look; then with a quiver, "Yes, sir."

"Come, children!" The priest folded the old shawl about the treasure, and holding it against his breast led Meg from the house, followed by the Boy, who looked very solemn indeed.

Under the bright colored trees the three went slowly. Father McNamara's eyes were shining and kindly, and once or twice he pressed the plump hand within his own.

And so they came to the old inn just at the outer edge of the cluster of houses, and who should they see upon the porch but Cheap Johnny himself, eating a luncheon of brown bread and cheese.

Meg clutched the strong hand, and drew in her breath. Even the boy eyed the peddler with a rigid interest.

"My man," said Father McNamara, "this little maid has something of yours that she desires to return. She is very, very sorry." With that the priest laid the bundle in Meg's hands, and she went tremblingly forward.

"There," she faltered. "Please forgive me!" The peddler arose and looked past the child, at the man.

"Your reverence," he said, "I knew all about it. I only had the one, and I missed it at once, but, how could I say anything—for I guess I knew what it meant to the likes of her." He did not take the extended doll. "She's welcome, poor little soul," he went on, "more than welcome!"

"My good fellow," said the priest, "you must take it. For the child's happiness and peace, you must take it."

The peddler awkwardly obeyed.

"And now, children, come." They followed the old man, and their faces were happier than his. Well, on the way back, and before he bade them farewell, the kind voice said:

"Bless you both, and, little girl, when you say your prayers this evening, tell your mother all about it. She will love you the better, and you will be glad by and by!"

"And now let's go nutting!" said the Boy when once the door of the small brown house had closed upon their friend. "I told you it would be all right. I'm going to him every time I get into trouble."

The basket went home filled to the brim with ripe brown nuts, and two happy voices rang merrily over the load.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WITCH FRIEND.

SO many things happened to Margaret and Betty during the next week that little Meg of Long Ago was quite neglected. Not forgotten, you may be sure; but, as Betty said, "She was well out of her trouble, and that was something to be thankful for!"

Yes, the days were full to the brim, for a little cousin, living in the countrier-country, invited Margaret and Betty to spend five days with her, and, of course, there were no grandma and a grate fire at the "Red Barn House," and besides, after romping with the agile cousin Peggy all day long, there were no evenings; for the three little girls usually nodded over the supper table. Margaret did tell Peggy about the

story girl, though, as they played in the sunlight, and Peggy became vastly interested, and said that she must know the end of that Meg ; and Margaret promised to write the rest of the story out in real book fashion and send it on for winter reading.

Well, you may believe that the first evening the two little sisters returned to grandma's, they were eager enough to go on with the adventures of Meg.

"I feel," said Betty, dancing around on one foot, "as if she were sitting by the fire waiting for us. Ah! Margaret, don't take a second help of gingerbread. Think of Meg!"

Grandma and grandpa laughed and said that gingerbread was "bracing for an adventure, and Betty had best keep Margaret company." So Betty did, and it was a bit after seven before the three were around the cheery blaze.

"This is a very creepy part of Meg's story," smiled grandma; "there's a real

live witch in it; but, like most things that we fear, this witch was not nearly as fearsome as she was painted, and little Meg learned to love her very much."

"Love a witch," cried Betty. "Ugh!" But grandma had begun.

Now the Boy could read everything. He was the brightest boy you ever saw. He learned his letters by asking questions and he put them together into words all by himself. Then suddenly he could read! He found out wonderful things between covers of books, and he applied all he learned to real life. This did not frighten him at all, but it almost scared poor Meg to death, for she could not read then, and what the Boy told her was so spasmodic and startling that it quite upset all her former ideas of life. After the tragedy of the doll, Meg's mother did seem to love her little girl better. At least, she showed it more, and she planned the loveliest thing. One day a week Meg and the Boy spent together.

One week he came to Meg's house, and the next week she went to his; and all that winter they had the merriest time that ever was. And at Christmas—but that is going to be another story, I must get to the witch friend.

On one of the days in the early spring, when the Boy was visiting Meg, they were walking hand in hand down the big road, looking for May flowers, when suddenly the Boy said:

"You know old Nancy Lee?"

"Yes," answered Meg; "least I don't know her, but I know the look of her."

"Well," the Boy went on calmly, "she's a witch, only you mustn't tell a living soul or she'll snatch you!"

Meg fell back and stared at the Boy, her little face quite pale.

"How do you know?" she murmured. The Boy looked wise, and drew in his mouth grimly.

"I've studied it up," he replied.

"Where?" Meg felt cold, even in the soft spring air.

"In a book. It told a story about a witch; what witches do, and all that, and then it told a sure way to know a witch and how to act, so they won't snatch you."

"Tell—me—every—word!" commanded Meg, and if the Boy had not been a boy, I think he would have noticed the wide, fear-filled eyes.

"Well, the story was about a girl who did not know how to act, and she got snatched, and just managed to get away by the skin of her teeth. You see when you know a witch and see one coming all you've got to do is to smile as if you did not know; and if she stops to speak to you, you must talk about owls and pet snakes and white cats and moons, and things; and then like as not the witch will never do a thing to you."

"Like as not!" queried Meg; "why, isn't that a sure way?"

"Oh, yes," indifferently said the Boy;

"it's a sure way if your teeth don't chatter and give you away!"

"Oh!" sighed Meg, "go on!"

"Well, the way to tell them is by their noses and chins and their front fingers!"

"Their front fingers!" breathed Meg; "do they have rows of fingers?"

"No," sniffed the Boy, "this is your front finger." He held up a grimy member, and a flickering hope died in Meg's heart.

"Nancy Lee has a long, sharp nose," the Boy went on; "so have witches, always. Nancy Lee's chin comes up to meet her nose; so does a witch's. Then when a witch points at you she always does it with her front finger, and the finger is crooked. I watched Nancy and she points, and her finger is crooked! Then she mumbles like a witch; that's when she's working charms. You better believe I'm going to keep out of Nancy's way. I'm not afraid, but until I know a lot about owls and—and things I'm going to keep clear. There she is now!"

And with that the Boy went over the stone wall expecting Meg to follow—not because they were afraid; oh! no. Simply to be on the safe side. But Meg could not run. A great and heavy fear held her still. There she stood in the middle of the road, staring at the coming stranger and wildly trying to recall what she knew about owls, snakes, moons and—and—things.

Nearer came the old, bent figure. And yes! she was mumbling to herself; and her chin and nose did come nearly together. There could be no mistake. All hope rested now upon the favorite things to talk about, and the teeth not chattering.

Poor old Nancy Lee drew close to the small, rigid girl, and she smiled. Oh! the terror of it. And she pointed with a crooked front finger!

"Little girl," she said, "are you sick or lost?"

"Owls"—gasped Meg beside herself with

fright—" and moons. Do you like pretty white cats? I do—I just love them. And I like snakes—I mean I'm going to like them! and how do you do, ma'am!"

The two rows of white teeth were chattering pitifully.

"Why, it's a little simple child!" soothed the kind old voice; "come home with me, little girl, and I will find where you belong."

"Come home with me!" Those were the last words that Meg heard. As she saw the witch coming toward her, she fell in a heap on the road, and a darkness like night settled all around.

Of course there was nothing for old Nancy to do now, but pick up the queer little heap and carry it to her cabin in the woods, a good stretch away. This she did very gently and placed it upon her own neat bed; then set about to bring daylight back, and to scatter the sudden darkness. As she was working over little Meg who

should come along but Father McNamara; and when he heard what had happened he was quite frightened. He sat down beside the bed and took hold of Meg's cold hand and stroked it. Then suddenly the big, brown eyes opened, and oh! but it was a goodly sight to see the kind old friend in that strange place.

"Tell me all about it, my child." How well Meg recalled the comfort that followed that other telling.

"I don't—want her to hear," she whispered, pointing to Nancy Lee. So the gentle old man asked Nancy to brew him a cup of tea while he watched Meg. When the two were alone the frightened little girl stammered out the terrible truth about the witch and all of the dreadful adventure.

Never once did Father McNamara speak until the quivering story was finished, and just as it ended the Boy rushed in almost as frightened as poor Meg had been; for when he had seen Nancy going down the road

carrying Meg he thought the worst had happened, and, even risking his own life, with little or no knowledge of owls and snakes, he stumbled on and had at last found the cabin! It was wonderful how much the good priest understood. One look at the Boy's face and he knew that he was no coward who took pleasure in frightening little girls. He knew that the Boy was a healthy, brave boy who simply had not thought deeply. So he drew him close and in a low, gentle tone explained how foolish it all was and how Nancy was no witch, but a kind, loving, lonely old woman. He told how Nancy had once been pretty and young. She had had a brave husband and a dear son and daughter, but the husband and daughter died and the boy had gone to sea and never came back. Every night, Father McNamara said, Nancy Lee put a candle in her cabin window, for she still thought some day her boy would come sailing home.

The Boy and Meg were looking very

humble when the story was finished, and when Nancy came back four arms were stretched out to her and two contrite voices begged her to excuse them for making so much trouble. Poor Nancy smiled happily and really looked pretty.

"I have a nice little lunch!" she said gayly; "honey and white bread, and cookies fresh to-day. And a fine brew of tea for your reverence."

And you may take my word for it there never was a gayer luncheon than that one in the cabin. Little boys' and girls' tears lie right next door to laughter, you know, and the Boy fairly shouted at Nancy's droll stories, and Meg had to be held on her chair once by Father McNamara while he told of the days in old Ireland when he was a small boy and drove a donkey.

"I'm coming often to see you," Meg said at parting, to Nancy.

"And so am I," cried the Boy, "and I'll chop your wood for you."

"And I'll ask mother to let me bring you milk," added Meg. And four old eyes watched them going down the sunny road, and Nancy knew that she was never going to be quite so lonely again.

"Ah!" exclaimed Margaret, as grandma paused. "I should have been frightened, too, but it is always foolish."

"I think," said Betty, slowly, "I think the Boy was the splendidest boy I ever heard of!"

"So he was!" laughed grandma, "and he kept growing splendid and more splendid until—"

"Chicks!" cried grandpa from the doorway. "Here are letters from over the sea. Letters brimful of love and news." There was no romp that evening, you better believe, but a joyous hour in the "den" while grandpa read the wonderful letters.

CHAPTER V.

THAT GLORIOUS CHRISTMAS.

"THE Christmas! The Christmas!" begged Margaret and Betty together the next night. "We must hear about the Christmas."

Grandma laughed. "Dear me!" she said. "We'll have to go back a bit, then, for it was spring, you remember, in the last story."

That's the fun in a story—life," mused Margaret. "You can skip just where you please."

"True!" nodded Grandma. "Well, then, just listen."

Sleigh bells a-ringing and snow a-glistening and .Meg jumping up and down by the window in a new red frock, waiting

for the Boy! Would you believe it, they wanted their Christmas together so much that the grown-ups had decided to bring the Boy and his Christmas to Meg's house, and both families enjoy it together. Was there ever such a lovely plan? And what a day it was! Cold and shiny out of doors; big fires crackling on every hearth as if they, too, had secrets they were aching to tell. The smell of mince pies and turkeys in the air, and mystery just bursting all over the house. And at last the Boy's family came in sight. On the front seat were the father and the Boy. Behind were the mother and the nice old grandma, who did believe in spoiling children, and meant to give Grandma Thompson a lesson. And piled up between were bundles and boxes big enough and queer-shaped enough to set a small girl, in a red dress, quite giddy.

"I've got new trousers and— and a vest! Merry Christmas!" roared the Boy, bursting into the house.

"And I've got a red dress—not a made-over one!" shyly cried Meg. "Father brought the stuff from town, and I've got new shoes and red stockings."

"You look—you look—yum! yum," the Boy admitted, eyeing her critically.

"You — look — kingdiferous!" laughed Meg admiringly. "Your trousers are the fittiest ones you ever had."

"That's because they were not made from father's," whispered the Boy. "When I'm a man, I'm always going to have my trousers made for me first," he continued; "don't tell mother, but she can't come up to these!" He put his hands proudly in his pockets and strutted perfectly beautiful.

"Come all!"—it was Meg's father who called—"form the procession and follow your leader. We'll begin at the top of the house and work our way down, a hunting our Christmas. Whenever you see a twig of holly waving, you best peep there pretty sharp."

Not since the day when she had taken the dolly back to Cheap Johnny had Meg visited the attic world. She had never been sure how the knot hole would look, and besides, things were different. And now they were going up there, all of them! Suppose they should suspect! The Boy would be sure to laugh at the packing box mansion, and if Rebecca and Jane were in sight, all would be lost! But there was nothing to do but go!

So the Boy's mother walked behind Meg's father, then followed the Boy's father and Meg's mother, and next the two dear grandmas all smiles and dimples, and lastly, the Boy and Meg, hand in hand and trembling with excitement. Sprigs of holly were spied on the way up, but the order was to "work the way down," so up to the attic they all paraded singing "Christmas Bells" as loud as they could.

Once the attic was reached Meg glanced

at the knot hole. Wonder of wonders! It was the cheeriest looking knot hole one could fancy, and it held a spray of holly! Then Meg looked down and every one kept as still as could be.

"Oh!" breathed Meg, and again "oh!" She rubbed her eyes and shook her plump little shoulders. How she had dreamed of this Christmas, but this was the joyfullest dream of all! Was it a dream? Well, Meg would touch it. If it faded away, why then it was a dream! Very cautiously she went forward as one always does in dreams. The packing box mansion was a mansion indeed. Even Meg's imagination could not have planned such splendor. Dear little chairs and cunning kitchen pans and pots, and a stove! She dared not touch that. Even a dream is better than nothing, and Meg could not have that stove fade—yet!

"Ah!" never had her attic world echoed such a cry. "See!" The Boy came close.

He was not too big for the life under the knot hole! "See!" It was a doll. Not one like the dear lost one that had come in the wrong way—but such a doll as had never found its way into the village before. Its eyes were blue—blue as the Boy's own—and they were the bluest ones Meg had ever seen. And there were real curls, soft and yellow, framing a face all pink and white, like a May bud. And the dress! No bit of calico, I would have you know; but white and lacey. Such dresses as surely only angels wear! And slippers, on the dearest feet, and stockings as true as life!

Dream or no dream, Meg dropped on her knees and clasped the joy to her beating heart. And it did not fade! No, the pretty pink cheeks remained, even under the shower of kisses.

Just then the Boy did a beautiful thing. He knelt down beside Meg and whispered, "Merry Christmas," and then Meg knew it

was all true. She clasped the doll closer now, and, looking back at the treasures that would keep, she joined the procession. Such fun they had. Under one bit of holly were skates for the Boy. He had only slid so far during his winters; and there were books for him at every turn; and Meg's father found a watch, and Meg's mother a silk dress, and the grandmas found warm shawls and lovely caps and cornucopias of peppermints. And the Boy's mother found a gold chain and a new hat, and his father found an overcoat with a fur collar, and there were candies, and little things strewn around everywhere, and no one got what belonged to any one else. There was something very odd about that.

Then the dinner! I can hardly tell you about that. It was like the jolliest Christmas dinner you have ever known—could anything be jollier?

The Boy and Meg had as many "helps"

as they wanted, and not once did any one say, "Don't do that."

"And now," Grandma Travers stopped suddenly, "who do you think gave the beautiful doll?"

"Santa Claus," said Betty, promptly.

Grandma smiled. "He gives wonderful things, dear, but he did not give that, and somehow I think you will love to think of Meg better by and by if you know the real giver."

"Her mother," suggested Margaret. "It's a mother-thing."

"Nay, not that time. She furnished the pretty house, but some one else had thought of the doll first."

"Dear Father McNamara," exclaimed Betty, bringing out the long name with a flourish. Grandma shook her head.

"It could not have been Nancy Lee, for she did not know," mused Margaret.

"Ah! Cheap Johnny!" shouted Betty triumphantly.

"Warm!" laughed grandma; "he had a hand in it, did good John."

"Could it—have—been—" Margaret's eyes were shining, and so were grandma's —"could it?"

"Yes, dear Margaret—it was Boy. All his chore money he had saved, and he worked a little harder and ran more errands and he walked five miles to find Cheap Johnny and give instructions. And when Johnny returned he had that lovely doll all in a box by itself! It was the Boy's thought."

"Oh!" breathed Betty in an ecstasy of worship, "if—if I could find that boy—I'd —I'd kiss him to pieces!" And at that grandpa pounced down on little Betty and said:

"Make believe that I am the Boy, you young owl with the shining eyes; kisses are good for the old boys as well as young ones! Now come to the den, all three of you. I have a surprise for you."

"What is it?" asked Margaret.

"Why, a magic lantern show and the merriest supper afterward of cocoa and crackers, but I'm not telling. Come and see!"

And that night they sat up until ten minutes after nine!

CHAPTER VI.

A BOSOM FRIEND—AND TROUBLE.

THERE was a great storm raging. Margaret and Betty drew the curtains close to keep out the black, black night. Grandma piled on the logs and the fire snatched them at once, while the merry sparks darted up the chimney and out into the storm and fury to tell how sweet and homey it was in the library at Sunny Acres.

"We must have a summer story to-night," said grandma; "I always believe in telling winter stories when the days are very hot; and warm, sunny stories when the chill winds blow. They make people more comfortable. If I had my way, I'd have all the Fourth of July stories at Christmas and the Christmas stories on the Fourth."

"How funny!" laughed Margaret. "Just fancy reading about hanging up your stocking while firecrackers were snapping!"

"Yes," added Betty, "but Santa Claus might put torpedoes in your stocking, and that would be lovely. I never have enough. But, anyway, grandma, that dear Meg is nice in summer or winter. She's just like other girls."

"Well, I told you," grandma said, "that she was often naughty and in this summery bit of her life I am pained to say that she was—well, rather frisky!"

"Goody!" cried both little girls; "do begin at once, grandma!"

And grandma began.

Meg had never had any playmate but the Boy. You see she lived on a lonely farm and everyone was busy, and Grandma Thompson thought children were better by themselves for they always made mischief if there were many of them. Meg's mother insisted, however, upon the Boy coming once

a week, and he and Meg were the best of chums. They really did not know how much they meant to each other until the Bosom Friend appeared. No one knew she was that for quite a while. To her own folks she was known simply as little Mary. She was very pretty, very bright and she came from a far away, big city, where little girls are different from their country cousins.

One morning Meg's father said: "The big house is going to be opened at last. Colonel Farley is going to use it in the future for a summer home!" This was exciting news, indeed. Never in Meg's life had the "big house" been opened except when old Mrs. Jenks went there to clean and air it. It was on a hill near Meg's home—think of that to a lonely little maid!—and its grounds ran down to a pretty brook that divided them from Meg's own garden.

"Oh!" sighed she, "I do hope there is a girl!" Now it was queer that Meg did not

say a "boy," for she was used to a boy, but way down in her heart, without really knowing it herself, she craved the companionship of a girl.

"Well, there is one!" said father; "one about your age, I heard Martha Jenks say so."

After that, wild horses could not have drawn Meg away from the spot from which she could best view the big house. And on the third day she saw the very loveliest little girl run down her hill to the merry brook, and Meg, who was on her hill, tucked her sunbonnet under her arm and scampered down to the brook also. Once there, however, a sudden shyness seized her. She peeped through the bushes and she saw that the new little girl was unlike anything she had expected. She was like the beautiful Christmas doll. Her curls were golden, and tied with pale blue ribbon; her dress was white and she wore no gingham apron, nor was there a hated sunbonnet in sight. As

Meg looked and looked at the dazzling vision, the new little girl began to sing, and this is what she sang in a sweet, thin, small voice :

Pretty little silver brook, whither do you go ?
Singing on, laughing on, your secret I would know.
Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, I will come with you,
We'll run along together neath the sky so blue.

Never in her life had Meg heard anything so bewitching. But what was the new little girl doing ?

Taking off her shoes and stockings ! Yes ; there they were lying on the bank, and two sweet, pink feet were daintily tiptoeing into the stream.

"Tra-la-la-tra-la-la, oh, but it is cold !" The little girl set everything to music. Meg concluded that was her way of talking. Maybe she was not a girl, after all, but one of those booky creatures that the Boy read about. The thought was disheartening.

"But little Mary does not mind, she's

very, very bold. Tra-la-la-tra—" the child stopped suddenly, for Meg's head, then her whole little gingham-clad body, came through the bushes.

"Goodness!" said little Mary, "how you frightened me!" She was holding her dainty skirts high, and the rippling brook went swirling about the pretty feet in the maddest manner.

Meg eyed her tragically. "Are you afraid of thunderstorms?" she asked.

"Awfully!" little Mary promptly replied; and she looked up into the bluest June sky that ever was.

"And crabs?" further questioned Meg.

"Ooh!" shuddered Mary. "I saw some once in a box at the fish stall. They are all leggy and hideous!"

Now among the many things the Boy had told Meg was the thing she now solemnly repeated to little Mary. The Boy was afraid of nothing, but to this new girl Meg poured the secret fear that had haunted

her last summer, and had caused her to keep to dry land.

"If you go into the brook barefooted," she panted excitedly, "a crab may catch your toes; if it does, it will never, never let go until it thunders! I don't know which I'd rather have—the crab or thunder. So I stay out!" Little Mary was high and dry by this time and her sweet face was filled with alarm.

"Oh, thank you," she said, "do you know I never heard that, and I've been to school! I was going to run as far as the brook runs, but just—think—what—might have—happened!"

Mary and Meg were drawing close to the little streamlet now, and Mary rapidly put on her shoes and stockings. "What's your name?" she asked presently.

"Meg."

"Meg? That's a funny name."

"My whole name is Margaret."

"Ah! I had a nurse named that once.

She was a very pleasant nurse and some of them are horrid." Meg had not the least idea what a nurse was, but she did not like to ask.

"Where do you live?"

"Up there!" The small, brown finger pointed to the farmhouse on the hill.

"Goody! I live up there." A dimpled, white finger pointed to the big house.

"What have you got such funny clothes on for?" asked Mary, "and why did your nurse braid your hair so tight? You look as if it hurt; it pulls your eyes!"

"It don't!" A new, shamed feeling was borne in upon poor little Meg at that minute. "I braid my own hair, and I dress myself. I've got a lovely red dress."

"Oh! why don't you wear it, then?"

"It's for Sundays."

This information puzzled Mary, but she let it pass.

"Can you come over?"

"No."

"I want to play with you!" Little Mary grew serious.

"Mother— never— lets— me— go— on other people's property!" This was a mortifying confession, but very necessary.

"Oh" cried Mary, brightening, "mine does!" and with a hop, skip and a jump from stone to stone she was beside Meg. "And now," she rippled, "let's play! I'm going to be your bosom friend, and you're going to be mine."

This sounded delightful, but Meg had to ask what a bosom friend was.

"Why, it's your dearest, dearest, owniest friend. You have secrets with her, and you just love her! I have a bosom friend in every place I go."

This rather dashed Meg. The first part was beautiful, but one in every place was too spreading. However, she could not be over particular, and a bosom friend was worth while having, no matter if you could not have her all to yourself. So little

Mary and Meg became bosom friends all on that glorious June day. And they played beside the brook while the glad hours sped. All too soon a loud call of "Margaret! Margaret!" startled both little girls.

"Are they calling you?" asked Mary, and Meg nodded, while her little lips set close. She knew she might not be able to return, and the present was too sweet to let go.

"Margaret! Margaret!" Then a naughty impulse entered Meg's heart. She would not answer, and after a while the call would cease and the fun might go on.

"Margaret! Margaret!"

"Mother tunes her pipes well!" whispered Meg, while a defiance of law crept into the little heart.

Mary laughed at the odd expression.

She found her new bosom friend vastly diverting.

"Aren't you ever going to answer?" she said.

"No."

Just then there was a crackling of the bushes, and mother, angry and perplexed, came upon the scene.

"Didn't you hear me?" she said.

"Yes'm."

"Who—who—is this child?"

"Little Mary, mother, and she's my bosom friend!"

"She is, eh! Well, we'll see about that. Go home at once, you naughty child. Go to your room. You can have no friend who so early teaches you to defy your mother."

Mary saw the little check gingham friend go up the hill humbly enough beside the tall mother, and real sympathy filled her heart. Then she made up her mind to do a very daring thing. She would save her bosom friend if she could!

Home she ran as fast as her nimble legs would take her. She ate her luncheon in silence, for she had big matters on hand.

She must do the thing just right. She must make a dignified call at the farmhouse, and when Meg's people saw what a nice, polite little lady she was, they would be willing to have their little girl play with her.

She knew that when her mother went calling in the city she took her cards, and sent one in by the maid. Mary had gone with her mother once or twice—and folks always dressed in their very nicest.

"I wish I had a Sunday dress," sighed little Mary, remembering Meg's possession, "but I'll put on my party dress." After luncheon she went upstairs alone and began operations. The party dress, without mother's or nurse's help, was a problem; and in the end had to be buttoned in front. Then to cover that defect mother's silk mantle was brought into service. This not only covered the party dress, but Mary as well. The new hat was set jauntily on the sunny curls and, cardcase in hand, Mistress

Mary sallied forth. She kept to the shelter of trees and bushes till at a safe distance, for, noble as this mission was, Mary considered it wiser to keep her business to herself.

Over the shining brook, up the farther hill went the quaint little figure—up to the closed front door of the farmhouse.

Knock! knock! knock! thumped the iron knocker. No answer. Knock! knock! again. Then a little brown head cautiously showed itself between the shutters of an upstair window.

"Landy!" ejaculated Meg, for the brown head was hers, "what's the matter?"

"I've come calling!" answered Mary sedately. Where's your maid?"

"Our what?"

"Maid."

"We—we—there isn't any."

"Well, then, you must come down and take my card to your mother."

"I can't come down until supper time."

This was disheartening.

"Go around to the kitchen door," suggested Meg kindly.

"Kitchen door!" Little Mary's face flushed.

"Yes; mother and grandmother are there; they're doing up strawberries."

This was more and more puzzling.

"Meg, you must come down and take my card. It is the only way. I'm sure you will be forgiven."

Meg risked the future to see this thing out. Down she came very softly, opened the front door and let Mary into the grim, dim parlor; then she took the magic card.

The sensation created in the kitchen when Meg's mother saw that bit of pasteboard caused Meg to think that she would escape all future notice indeed.

"Mrs. Brandon Farley! Land of Goshen! And calling right in the middle of the afternoon! Is she dressed up, Meg?"

"Yes-m. She's got on a short dress with

lace ruffles and pink stockings, and slippers with criss-crosses on the ankle, and a big cape that flops considerable, and a round hat with a wreath of roses."

"She must look like a circus acting woman," put in Grandma Thompson. "What do you suppose possesses her?"

"I'll have to go!" said Meg's mother, weakly; "here, Meg, untie my apron, and is my hair smooth?"

"Yes'm. You look pretty, mother."

In the dark, cool parlor it took the mother a full moment to make out just where her visitor sat, then she saw—Mrs. Brandon Farley!

"Land of love," she exclaimed, "whatever—" she thought it was a joke and grew indignant.

"I've come to call," said little Mary.

"I thought if you saw me and knew that I was not a horrid girl you would let me be your little girl's bosom friend. She did not mean to be naughty, but she

was having such a good time. Did you ever have a bosom friend ?"

Meg's mother thought of one that she had loved so long ago, and she said softly, "Yes, my child."

"Well, then, you know how it feels. I've had hundreds, but Meg says I'm the first one she ever had, and—and don't you see, that is why she did not want to come to luncheon."

A twinkle came in the mother's eyes.

"I see," she said, "and now, since you have made your call, do come in the kitchen and let grandmother see you; she knew your grandmother years ago; it will do her heart good." So, two forgiven bosom friends went hand in hand into the sunny kitchen, and Grandma Thompson was delighted with this new little girl, who looked as her grandmother had years ago, when the two old ladies had been children. And then Meg's mother put the little girls up to the table, and tied aprons

under their chins, while they ate " tastings " of strawberry preserve out of yellow bowls.

It was quite the merriest afternoon Mary had ever had, and she had " saved " Meg.

CHAPTER VII.

GREAT TRAVELERS AND—AN ACCIDENT.

NOW that little Mary had entered into the evening story, Margaret and Betty could hardly wait for evening to come. They wanted grandma to begin before supper, but she never would.

"It takes firelight and outdoors shut away to make me see those little girls of long ago," said she. "Somehow they only seem little and distinct when the logs crackle and the curtains are drawn. Once let the sun shine on them and they grow big at once and are—lost."

Well, it would never do to lose Mary, Meg, and the Boy, so the little sisters waited with what patience they could.

"Isn't it funny?" said Betty one day to

Margaret, "that we have never asked grandma what the Boy's name was?"

And that evening when they were cozily gathered together Betty asked grandma what the Boy's truly name was. "What did they call him in school?" Grandma's eyes twinkled.

"He had not gone to school then. He was going to have a teacher at home soon, and it was planned that Meg should share the instruction, but in those first sunny days every one called him Boy. I think we'd better call him that, too. He is more real as just 'Boy.' His eyes were bluer, and his curls ruddier before he had a big name."

So it was Boy again when grandmother began about the great travelers.

"It is going to be summery for quite a long time now," grandma began. "Oh, that was such a summer! So full of happenings. Smiles, pouts and I must warn you—tears, too! But what of that, if they

can all be wiped away in the end to make place for sunshine?"

Now there seemed to be nothing little Mary was not allowed to do.

Her father actually urged her to climb and romp and shout. He told her when she was "forty-leven years old" she could put her hair up, and act prim. Until then he wanted her to run wild.

Think of that! "Run wild." Grandma Thompson shook her head.

"She'll be a sad tomboy!" sighed she, "and the child would be a little lady like her grandmother before her, if they would let her alone." But they did not leave her alone. And during that beautiful summer her sweet little primrose face grew deliciously brown, and you could hear her call from the big house to the farmhouse:

"Hi, there! Meggie, can you come out?"

And hardly ever did mother say, no. Meg's pleading eyes were too much for her.

So "out" Meg ran and over the brook to her bosom friend; or the bosom friend ran to her and then they scurried away into their world which was not the world of the grown-ups at all. And the Boy? Well, at first he put his sturdy hands in the pockets of his everyday trousers—they were not the "fittiest" ones—and thought that there was no place for him any more. Not for the world would he have let Meg see how he felt. The Boy was proud and brave, and if he felt a sigh coming he turned away and ground his heel in the grass. He disapproved of bosom friends from the first.

They were silly and they kissed too much; but the boy was honest enough to own that little Mary was worth watching. So he watched her from afar, and Mary took heed of him as he sat upon a rail fence one day, and said with a laugh:

"Who is he?"

"The Boy," answered Meg, and just because she was so fond of him, and felt in

her heart that she was not treating him quite fairly she blushed a pretty red.

"What boy?"

"Oh, only Boy. Every one calls him that."

"Boy, come here," little Mary beckoned, and for the life of him the Boy could not but obey, though he scorned himself for the weakness.

"What do you want?" he asked gloomily, shifting from one foot to the other and feeling himself grow awkward under the gaze of the merry eyes.

"Play with us."

"Play?" stammered the Boy; "play what?"

"Oh, things, Meg and I play all day. We make things up."

Meg gave a glance at her first friend. They had made things up, too, and she knew that he was a master hand at it.

A twinkle came in the Boy's eyes. You see, he was not perfect, and he resented the

way Meg had spurned him for the bosom friend.

"All right," he said. "Come on; let's go to the pond and play ocean."

Meg's heart sank. The pond was in the south meadow. It had a splendid willow tree beside it, and it was an ideal spot for real fun. But, alas! while the Boy was allowed to build a raft and float upon the fascinating water, Meg had orders to keep on land, for if she got her feet wet—then no more south meadow!

Of course, little Mary could do as she pleased. Oh! the bitterness of the thought.

But to the pond the three scampered; and for the first time in her life Meg's heart had a queer feeling in it toward the Boy.

"Now," said the Boy, taking command when once he saw his fleet riding at anchor under the willow tree, I'll tell you what. Right here by the willow tree is America, and the pond is the Atlantic Ocean—can't you see the billows?"

Little Mary said yes, she could see them plainly, and her dimples grew deeper. Meg saw them, too; indeed it had been she, in the old days, who had discovered them!

"I don't!" she said, sulkily.

"Don't, then," laughed the Boy; "but they'll roll in just the same. Over across the ocean is Europe" he went on, "and castles and forts and—and things. I'll be captain of this big ship"—he was untying the raft.

"And oh! goody, goody!" almost shrieked little Mary, "Meg and I will be grown up ladies and go on the ship to Europe!"

She was prancing around like a young Indian.

"She isn't let," grinned the Boy, nodding toward poor, downtrodden Meg. "She isn't allowed to go on the water. But"—with a manly flourish—"she can walk around and meet us there!"

Walk around! Just fancy seeing your bosom friend and your old playmate sail away over the raging billows to that far away Europe, while you were left to walk around, all by yourself!

Meg's heart grew heavy within her. First she wished that the bosom friend had never come, and that she and the Boy had the world to themselves. In those days he had respected her limitations with gentle pity and had only gone on the raft as an ancient mariner who was obliged to follow the sea, but whose only happiness was to hurry back to the home under the willow tree, and chill Meg's blood by telling the awful horrors he had been through.

Then an anger grew against the Boy and Meg wished that she could do something to him! She clenched her small fists in the energy of this thought and tears came in the brown eyes; tears that four blue eyes never noticed, for the Boy and the bosom friend had already embarked and the tee-

tery ship was being prodded out on the raging Atlantic Ocean.

"Ah!" cried Mary, beside herself with glee. "This is such fun. O-oh! s'pose we should tip over!"

"I'd save you!" said the Boy in loud ringing tones, and Meg, poor, left behind Meg, heard and saw, and her cup of woe ran over.

"Are you going to walk around?" called back the Boy.

"No!" screamed Meg. Then an awful temptation came into her heart. The thought almost turned her dizzy, but with Meg, to think, was to act. "I'm not going to walk around. I'm going to walk over!"

The Boy stopped poling and he and Mary eyed, with wonder and alarm, Meg taking off her shoes and stockings on the edge of America's shores.

"You'll catch it!" yelled the Boy.

"I don't care," said Meg desperately,

"and I'm not afraid of crabs or thunder, either!"

This information staggered little Mary.

"Isn't she brave?" she whispered to the Boy.

"No," laughed he; "she is just silly and she'll get all the trouble she wants."

By this time Meg had pulled up her gingham skirts and was wading out into the depths of the ocean.

There were more depths than one would imagine; for after the depths of water there were depths of mud. Such fearful, mushy mud! Meg grew sick with horror. What might be in that mud, she dared not think. Crabs might be the least of the terrors. The slime oozed up between her toes and she could not even see what might befall her, for the raging billows grew light brown as she sloughed ahead. But do you think she would turn back? No, no! Now that she had started, she would make Europe wetfooted, or she would perish in the

attempt. But she was in the mood to take in very bad temper any slighting remark that might be hurled at her from shipboard. And the Boy was not above hurling some.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he cried, as he saw her nearing the noble vessel he was steering.

"I think I'm going to beat your old raft, walking!" Meg jeered back.

For a moment little Mary's sporting spirit saw only a race in view and she clapped her hands and called: "Go it, Meggie, if you beat us, I'll give you my new box of paper dolls."

The Boy scowled at Mary. It was bad enough to have Meg spattering closer, but to have his passenger list take this impartial position was a little too much!

"How would you like to be tipped over?" he asked in terrifying tones.

"O-oh!" quivered Mary, "it would frighten me to death."

"How would you?" This came from

Meg, and she glared at the Boy with a new and paralyzing expression.

They were all in midocean now, and Meg, though she did not know it, had the best of it. Her two feet, buried many inches in the hidden mud, were a firmer foundation than the Boy's ship had as it teetered on the browny deep.

"Don't you touch—this—this ship!" he commanded, and there was fear—real, true fear in his voice.

"Do you dare me?" asked Meg, squeezing the mud through her toes and forgetting everything but her mischief.

"Yes—no—yes I do!" There was bravado in the Boy's eyes. Little Mary, never dreaming of the danger that was so near, looked on at this test of wills with a strange interest.

"Well, then, here you go!" cried Meg, and with one mighty effort she tipped the ship endwise and all aboard slipped into the awful depths!

THEY WERE ALL IN MIDOCEAN NOW.

Little Mary went under with a piercing shriek that turned Meg to stone as she stood knee-deep in mud and water. The Boy, with a splutter, gasped, "you just wait!" And Meg waited. It seemed like a black eternity before the two arose from the deep. And when they did! Ah, who can paint the picture they presented? Black mud dripped from them, and even their mouths were filled with the dreadful slime. Mary's frightened blue eyes, and the Boy's awful blue eyes, alone could be recognized as familiar.

Neither spoke; they really couldn't. And there, in midocean, Meg looked and looked and the future seemed as dark as the mud. Then in silent fear they all waded ashore and reached Europe, in comparative safety. Once on land, the Boy cleared his mouth first, for he had many things to say to Meg—things that would show her beyond doubt what he thought of her. He picked up a handful of grass—it seemed

the only thing in the landscape that was not muddy—and he began to wipe his lips. Mary made no attempt to get the mud off. It looked hopeless and she thought she would have to go through life in that condition, so she began to cry and that made more mud. Before either the Boy's wrath was let free, or Mary's tears had done much damage, a great shout startled the woebegone three.

"Jumping Jehosaphat!" said a deep voice; "what in the world is the matter?"

Then a mighty laugh filled the troubled atmosphere and Mary's father came running down a hill.

The story was told through mud and repentance. Sometimes one talked, but oftener all three, and then a strange thing happened.

"Come along, all of you!" laughed Mary's jolly father. "I wouldn't have mamma miss a sight of you for twenty-five dollars."

And so they went to the big house and the pretty mamma laughed until she cried. Now who would have thought that adventure was a laughing matter? Then Mammy Jane Ann came and took all three and "washed them up." Afterward she dressed Meg in an outfit of Mary's clothes and, wonder of wonders, a charming suit of clothes that Mary's papa had worn when he was a boy, was unearthed in the attic, and if you only could have seen the three as they returned to the big piazza I am sure the sight would have done you good.

Then the jolly father hitched up the horses and he and Mary went to make peace at the farmhouse—and they did it, too. But, strange to say, Meg, Mary and the Boy never had a quarrel afterward. All mean tempers seemed sunk in the mud, and they were bosom friends.

"Oh! oh! oh!" laughed Betty. "I think that was the funniest thing Meg ever did."

"I know just how she felt," mused Margaret, after a minute's thought. "I felt that way when Fanny Alton went to Polly Martin's party and I was not invited. I told Fanny her party dress was hideous and I almost felt as if I hated Fanny."

"Yes," nodded grandma, "when the little imp of jealousy is set free in any childish heart he is apt to make trouble. Dear me! Grandpa has not returned from old Mrs. Martin's yet. The poor soul must be really ill. Never mind, lasses; we can do without a romp one night."

CHAPTER VIII.

A PARTY AND A NEW GRANDMOTHER.

MARGARET and Betty and grandfather had been chestnutting one day, and when it was story time the two little sisters brought a nice lot of shining nuts to the library and put them on the hearth. After the story grandfather was to come and they were all going to roast apples and nuts.

"We're going to a party to-night!" grandma announced. "Meg's first party! So put on your company manners, my dears, and trip back with me—dearie me! I will not say how many years—and we will find Meg and little Mary and the Boy in quite a twitter."

It was Mary's birthday. A very great event, indeed, in the big house. And Mary

was to have a party with the Boy and Meg for guests. But there was a strange thing to happen at the party. Mary was to see her Grandma Farley for the first time! Grandma Farley was the jolly papa's mother and she had lived abroad ever since Mary was born. Just think of that! But the jolly papa said she was a globe-trotter and did not deserve to see Mary now that she had actually said she was coming. However, the big house was full of excitement. The grandma was coming the very day of the party and the jolly papa had planned a plan. He had found in the attic —there were strange things in the attic of the big house—a quaint little party dress that Grandma Farley had worn when she was a tiny girl. And would you believe it, it just fitted Mary! So it was planned that Mary should appear before her new grandma in that odd costume and see what grandma would say!

This was all very charming but the jolly

father forgot that Mary was a bosom friend and bosom friends do odd things.

Now, the Boy's mother had bought him a new suit for the affair. He was going to be elegant in buff linen and shiny shoes; but Meg's mother said she could not afford a new dress that would surely be ruined, so Meg was to wear a pink chambray, nicely starched and ironed, with white ruffles at the neck, and close bands at the wrist, buttoned with porcelain buttons. It was queer, but those crinkly-edged, shiny buttons took the life out of Meg.

"Oh, mother," she pleaded "if I must wear that old thing, please, please put pearl buttons on!" But mother was busy. She was preserving things, and it was harvest time, so she said in a hurt tone:

"I've done the best I could for you, Margaret; you can go or stay, as you choose."

That was a terrible alternative. Meg groaned it out up in the attic world, and

saw herself dead and gone and the family in deep anguish, many times; but the knot hole always smiled her out of such nonsense, and then she would go downstairs, look at the hated buttons and wish for fairy days and godmothers who could whisk those buttons off and put diamond ones on just as easy as anything! Then the day before the party Meg and Mary met by the brook and there, behind a clump of bushes, the secret of misery was whispered. Little Mary was all sympathy. When strong Meg cried there was surely deep trouble, and Meg cried then as if her heart would break. The tears ran down sweet Mary's chubby neck and tickled her.

"Oh, me, and oh, my!" sighed Mary, "and granny's dear dress is plaid, and all over lace and ruffles!"

Mary called her father daddy and her grandmother granny. To Meg this seemed almost like saying wicked words.

"And mommy has said that a little hostess—that's the girl who gives the party—should not be dressed better than her company. It isn't polite. Granny's dress is silk, and if you wear a washy dress it won't be right. I know!" Mary jumped up and shook some of Meg's tears off her shoulder, then she pranced about gayly.

"Why, I'm going to do the bonniest, friendliest thing! The party is at three to-morrow and daddy and mommy are going to the station to meet granny; they are to get here just at three and the party is to be on the piazza to meet them. Now, Meggie, you come down to the brook, when you are dressed, and so will I; and we'll change dresses and 'sprise them!"

"Do you dare?" gasped Meg, "and don't you mind—shiny buttons?"

"No, I don't mind the buttons!" Mary was kissing her friend, "and I'm not afraid of any—at least, not many things." Then

they kissed each other and were very happy.

Sure enough, the next day at half-past two, a little pink chambray figure, feeling very guilty and creepy, sped down the hill from the farmhouse.

"She gave in beautifully," sighed Meg's mother, to Grandmother Thompson, "I wish I had more time to spend on the child."

"Let well enough alone," said Grandmother Thompson. "I do wonder how Mrs. Farley is looking after all these years? Dear me, land alive, how long ago it seems since she and I were friends. She had a party, too, and we did such a silly thing the day of the party. I must tell Margaret about it when she comes home."

Well down by the brook Meg waited and pretty soon she heard:

"I'm a-coming! Yes, I'm a-coming.

"Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la!"

And sure enough there was little Mary a tripping down the farther hill. And how

she did gleam and glitter as she came along in the August sunshine.

The quaint old dress of plaid violet silk hung straight from the short plain waist. The dear little arms and neck were bare and the sweet face beamed happily in its setting of soft golden curls. Meg from her ambush saw the pretty picture and sighed to think that even in the grandeur of a real silk gown, she could never look like little Mary.

"Meggie!" Mary paused to listen. "Right here!" came the quick reply. And then you'd better believe there was considerable scurrying. Behind the clump of bushes the transformation went distractingly on. It was no easy matter for two excited little girls to change their dresses and get unruly buttons in the right holes.

"Oh, but you look be-au-ti-ful!" breathed Mary at last, standing off to view her handiwork. For really Meg could never have got herself into the snug, straight waist.

"Do you feel dreadful tight?" This question came after seeing Meg pant nervously.

"No-o," Meg replied. "I guess it's more pride than tightness. I never dreamed of silk on me!"

"The waist looks sort of stretched," Mary said, critically, "and there are little places between the buttons where your underwaist shows. If I were you, Meggie dear, I wouldn't eat much. I'll save it for you till you get a comfortable dress on—and if you feel a button fly off, why, keep your back to the wall."

Even with this terrifying, and half starved future facing her Meg's pride and joy grew.

"Do—do I look baggy?" Mary looked down upon the pink chambray. She certainly did look as if she might eat with safety, but the pink was mightily becoming to the dainty face; and the shiny buttons had no power to take from Mary's prettiness.

"You—you look like a rosebud!" whispered Meg rapturously, "and you are the best bosom friend that ever was!"

"Now we must run!" rippled Mary delightedly, "my! I feel like you. Meg, I wish we could change hair!" So did Meg, but that wish had to perish.

No one saw them as they crept cautiously up to the big house. The servants were busy, the carriage had not returned from the station and the Boy was not in sight.

"I suppose," breathed Meg as the two hid in the cool parlor until the carriage drove up, "I suppose if the Boy comes first he will say things!"

"Of course," nodded little Mary. Isn't it funny how many things he says? But I only laugh; if you answer him back he keeps right on, but if you smile, or give him something he stops right off."

This mode of dealing with the Boy was new to Meg. She had always met him on

equal terms, and gave and took with much courage.

"That's spoiling him!" she said.

"Of course," Mary agreed; "boys have to be, or—or you can't get them to do things!"

"Ugh!" grunted Meg. But just then carriage wheels were heard and for the first time Meg and Mary thought that perhaps this escapade was not quite right.

"There goes a button!" groaned Meg.

"Don't breathe any more, advised Mary in a hoarse whisper, "or, anyway, only use your nose."

Meg tried to do this, but another button snapped off with a sickening "click."

"I can breathe easier," she faltered, "but I must look terrible open up the back."

"You do," Mary said candidly, "and the other buttons look awfully uncertain."

"Oh!" half sobbed Meg, and she felt the pang that often goes with wearing borrowed finery.

"They are driving in through the gate," announced Mary. "No matter how you look, Meggie, keep smiling and come on."

The two were on the piazza holding each other closely by the hands when the carriage drove up.

Mary's father was driving, and on the back seat were the mamma and the new grandma. Meg had never dreamed that such a grandma could exist.

Of course, she must be old because her hair was white and she was a grandma. But the white hair was like Mary's, only it was silver instead of gold, and her eyes were like violets and full of twinkles. Her cheeks were rosy and soft and her dimples were as merry as Mary's, only they were long dimples instead of round, deep ones.

"Oh!" cried Mary and Meg together, and then they stood quite still.

The father and mother were simply staring but never a word said they. As soon as the jolly father had lifted the mother

and grandmother out, he drove away as if he had very important business, and the mother just kept right on staring.

Up the broad steps the two came, and then Grandma Farley sat down in a big rocking chair and said, "Well!"

Meg and Mary were speechless.

"You want me to guess which little girl is mine," smiled the dear old lady, "but as I live I feel as if I were in a dream! That is my dress," she touched with reverent fingers the violet plaid, and Meg grew scarlet under the mild eyes, "but the little face above the dress is so like the face of a dear, lost friend that it makes my old heart grow young. And this little maid? Why, dearie me! she has the eyes of my own little boy, and she looks—yes, she does look like the photographs that have come to me so often for many a long year. Read me the riddle, you small jugglers. What is the meaning of it all?"

Two heads sunk low and each little girl

waited for the other to speak. Just then the Boy dashed around the corner of the house, resplendent in his fine new store clothes. The party was now complete, but a very quiet party it seemed.

Then came a quivering little voice:

"Grandma, dear grandma, we changed dresses. I am your little girl," and two plump arms were about the dear old neck.

"And this little maid? Who, who is she?" Grandma held forth a trembling hand.

"I'm Meg; Margaret Thompson," faltered Meg, "and I was ashamed of my dress and Mary was good and did not mind, and—and—she is pretty enough to stand it—and—and I'm sorry and ashamed!" Both little girls were in Grandma Farley's arms.

"Why, my child!" she cried, "you are my old friend's little granddaughter! Surely this is a surprise party! And who is

this? Dear laddie, come close, my heart is big enough for you all."

"He's the Boy," whispered Mary.

"What boy, dear?"

"Why, the Boy!"

"Oh, to be sure! Boy, come right here."

Well, after that there was a party! The pretty mamma changed the two gowns and Meg discovered she was much happier in the pink chambray. The shiny buttons lost all their terrors after the new grandma said, "they were like the ones the other Margaret wore. She was a dear child!"

Such a supper as they had out on the south piazza! Meg did it full justice, for the pink dress was made to fit the round little body and no button that Meg's mother sewed on was ever known to come off. Then there were games and prizes and after all the whole party went in a body to the farm house and you just should have seen those dear grandmas catching up with all the lost years! And that night when Meg

was nestling in her bed and trying to forget the party long enough to get a wink or two, Grandma Thompson stole softly in and almost frightened Meg by saying:

"Child, I've come to tell you about the party that Mary's grandmother had. We did not change gowns, we did something worse."

"Worse! Oh, grandmother!" Never had Meg loved Grandma Thompson so well.

"Yes; she had lovely golden hair like Mary, and my hair was straight and dark; to even things up we both cut our hair close. It was she who was willing to do it for me. We both looked like little frights. But we were very happy."

"Now go to sleep, child," grandma was kissing the dimpled brown cheeks, "and if you count ninety white lambs going over the stile into Mary's meadow you will surely find your eyes closing. It is what the other Mary and Margaret used to do."

And, sure enough, Meg tried, and she

had just counted the fiftieth white lamb when, lo! the breakfast bell rang.

There was silence for a moment, then Betty said drowsily: "That wasn't such an exciting part of Meg, but I like it."

"Yes," nodded Margaret, "and she and Mary are just real girls. That's exactly the way they feel. I wonder, grandma, if that dear Meg was your bosom friend?"

"Not always," sighed grandma; "sometimes she was my worst enemy, as you shall see when next we hear about her."

"Which is not to be this evening!" cried grandpa from the hall; "I'm not going to do without a frolic. Come on, chicks! That white lamb prescription is fine. The next time I have a sleepless patient I shall try it."

Then away they all scampered, for grandpa had suddenly changed into a roaring lion, and if two white lambs hope to escape from such an encounter they needs must be spry.

CHAPTER IX.

A RUNAWAY PARTY, THE SAND MAN AND HOW THEY ALL CAME HOME.

WHEN Grandma Travers began the next time she said with a delicious little shudder: "I declare! the wind blows so, and the rain patters so, that it hardly seems fit to take you traveling to the Long Ago."

"O!" gurgled Betty, "we've got our rain coats on and rubber boots and we don't mind the wind. It blows us to the Long Ago."

"There is no escaping you!" sighed grandma. "But if I take you with me you must prepare yourselves for great happenings. For fear you may be worried part of the time, I will tell you right now, that

it turned out beautifully and everyone was happy."

"Goody!" cried Margaret, "I often wish books would have that on the first page. Sometimes I get so weak with excitement that I look in the back! Of course, that isn't right, but the people who make books ought to know that as long as we know things are going to end happy ever after, we can stand it even if our throats do get dry."

Grandmother Travers laughed and said:

"Sometimes you make me think of that long ago, Meg!"

"Do I?" asked Betty, hopefully.

"No; but, oddly enough, darling, you are like dear little Mary."

Could mortal children desire more? So down they cuddled by grandma's knee, and into grandma's eyes came the sweet, dreamy look. The wind sounded down the chimney with a roar and flurry, and it whisked them all away to the land of Long Ago.

"After the August party," grandma began, "time went flying by and before any one realized it, the September's golden glow was touched with frost."

"And now," said the jolly papa one day, "we must hie us back to the city and get Mary into harness."

Harness meant school. Little Mary's gentle mouth quivered.

"I know I shall die without Meg," she faltered. "Meg is the nicest bosom friend I ever had."

"How about Chloe and Janet; not to mention Marion and Barbara?" asked mother.

"I know," sighed Mary, "but they do not go as deep as Meg does."

"There are other summers, lassie," comforted Grandma Farley.

"But, oh, the winters!" wailed poor Mary.

Not long after, while her eyes were still pink from crying she sought Meg down

by the brook. There, behind the elderberry bush she unveiled the gloomy future. Meg listened and two great tears rolled down her cheeks. The future, indeed, was black and drear. Not even the prospect of sharing the tutor with the Boy had power to lighten the gloom. The tutor might open up fields of weird knowledge such as the Boy had, but no tutor could give anything so glorious as summer—and little Mary.

But Meg never cried without thinking of a way to stop tears. If her future was to be a drear empty blank it would be so in spite of her efforts.

"When are they going to take you away?" she asked in a hard, little voice.

"In three weeks." To name the brief spell brought another flood of tears. Meg thought hard and fast.

"We could be so awfully happy—just we two!" she sighed. "Do you think they would leave you in the big house, and I

would run over every morning with food for you?"

"Alone?" gasped Mary.

"It would be better than nothing," Meg replied, and in winter, when the snow drifted, I am sure the Boy would dig you out."

Little Mary stared helplessly. This was almost worse than the black future.

"If—if—you and the Boy were there," she quivered, "I should not mind so much. But all alone! Oh, Meggie! think of the nights."

Meg thought of them and weakened. Finally she had an inspiration.

"Would you—run away?" she whispered. Little Mary shivered.

"Where?"

"I know such a fine plan. I do not know why I did not think of it before. Boy just hates the new tutor, he told me so. The tutor is always making Boy do things his way, and, you know, no boy can

stand that long. Boy told me yesterday he had not made up his mind yet whether to go to sea, or go up on Break Neck Mountain and live in a hut. But he's going to do one. Now, don't you see, if we all run away to the hut we can keep house while Boy goes hunting and brings things in to cook."

"What will he hunt with?" asked Mary trembling. "I'm dreadfully 'fraid of shooting off things."

"Why—he can—he can hit things with sticks and stones!" Meg flung back, "and nights we can make a fire in the—the fireplace and tell stories and sit up as late as we want to!"

"That is perfectly beautiful!" cried little Mary clapping her hands. Maybe we can sit up until the Sand Man comes. I want to see him dreadful much. Nurse says he's always coming, but I never saw him."

Meg did not fancy a visit from the Sand

Man as much as Mary did. She was less familiar with him, and any kind of a man might upset the glorious scheme.

"Now let us run home and tell our mothers!" said little Mary.

"Tell—our—mothers?" cried Meg perfectly aghast at Mary's foolishness; "why when people run away they never tell a single soul."

"But—but—" the joy was gone from little Mary's face; "they will—they will be frightened!"

Meg gulped deeply, but to live without Mary was greater agony than any other, so she said tragically, and gloomily, "If we want to be always together, Mary Farley, I guess someone has got to suffer."

Of course Meg was very naughty, and she felt it herself, but, besides having Mary always, the joy of an absolutely free existence on Break Neck Mountain lured her on.

"This is Saturday, and the Boy is com-

ing to spend the day. There's Break Neck Mountain—" like a living sign post Meg pointed to where in the distance a beautifully wooded hill rose in the golden light.

"Where's the hut?" asked Mary, who wanted her doubtful course as clear as possible.

"Hidden!" said Meg mysteriously. She did not know herself, but she could not weaken while Mary was so uncertain.

Just then the Boy came tumbling and rolling down the hill, and landed plump between Meg and Mary. He was red in the face, and his eyes were blazing.

"I'm going to run away!" he bubbled as soon as his indignation would permit him to speak. "Yes'm. Run a-way!"

The Boy always said "yes'm" when he was not going to relent. Then came forth his tale of woe. The tutor was bad enough with his rules and remarks, but the tutor

was not going to stay. He had had a telegram!

Meg did not know what that was, but fancied it was some disease.

"And"—continued the Boy in a hoarse whisper—"they are going to send me away from home—to a—a boarding school!"

Again Meg was puzzled, and little Mary, seeing the trouble in the Boy's sunny face, bade good-by to her own doubts and qualms, and, like the unselfish little creature she was, cried:

"There, never mind. Meg and I will go with you. We have it all planned." The boy stared.

"Yes," broke in Meg, gripping at this new opening, "we're going to Break Neck Mountain to—to—the hut." Up to that time the hut had only existed in the Boy's fancy, but if Meg knew of it, too, why, then, there must be one. So those naughty children sat and planned their mischief until a double call came for dinner. Then Mary

scampered up her hill, promising to bring all the food she could gather, later, and the Boy and Meg ran up Meg's hill bent upon the same foraging expedition.

"Well, at two o'clock, when they met again by the elderberry bush, Mary had a noble store packed in the upturned skirt of her pretty blue dress. Mary had no difficulty in procuring cookies and fruit. With Meg it was different. Still, mother, thinking they were going to play house, had given Meg six crullers and the Boy an apple turnover.

The Boy stored the food in his hat and Mary's. The rest went comfortably in Meg's sunbonnet. Thus provisioned, they set their naughty faces toward Break Neck Mountain.

It was a long walk, and even sturdy Meg was tired at last. The Boy would not confess to the weakness, but when Mary suggested looking for nuts he willingly complied, and they hunted nuts by sitting in

one spot, and tossing up the fallen leaves lying nearest to them. Then they ate the turnover and felt better. Presently they began the upward climb. The Boy cut pilgrim staffs for them. He said they were things good people used when they traveled to holy places. This, somehow, had a tendency to comfort Meg and Mary, and for a while they climbed the rugged way in a happier mood. Indeed, Mary took to singing, and that helped a good deal. By and by the song ceased, and with a brave little voice Mary said:

"Is—is it growing nighttime?"

"No," replied the Boy, promptly. "The trees make it dark. Up on top it's always sunshiny."

"Oh, is it?" thankfully cried Meg. "I thought maybe it wasn't. I wonder where the hut is?"

"That's on the top, too," said the Boy, and he really believed it.

"I wish this was the top," panted little

Mary. Then she cried: "Oh, my! What do you think? My feet are getting mushy!" She was a bit ahead and as she spoke the Boy and Meg planted their feet in the mushiness.

"I did not know mountains were soft," half sobbed Mary, floundering in a boggy hole; "oh, me! oh, my! I'm in over my shoes."

So were they all, but they clung together and finally got out on the other side of the swampy place. They were in an open spot now, but, strange to say, it was still dark.

"It is night," cried Mary, and her dear little face shone white. Just then a roll of thunder echoed among the rocks and trees, and three faces gleamed very pale.

"Let's go home," wailed Mary, surrendering at the first attack. The others looked around, and realized that they did not know where home was.

Mary was crying pitifully and Meg

wanted to, but the Boy felt his manhood, and shouted above the rising gale:

"I'll lead you to the hut. You just trust me!"

Under the circumstances there was nothing else to do, so the three plunged into another thicket.

"Let's kneel down and pray to God to show us the hut!" shrieked Mary, beside herself with terror. The rain was coming, and the wind was rising.

"No!" screamed the Boy, gripping his two companions, and leading blindly onward and upward; "let's run, and pray while we run!"

So they rushed along and between the noises of the storm, words of gentle prayer floated.

Suddenly the answer came. Right in front of them was a little wooden hut, and the door was wide open! In they huddled, and braced themselves against the door, which they shut behind them.

"What did I tell you?" gloated the Boy," we would not have found it if we hadn't run."

"And prayed!" insisted little Mary.

"Both!" laughed Meg; "both together did it! Oh, how the wind is pushing the door."

They braced themselves rigidly and talked no more. They needed all their strength. A long time ago a lumberman had built the tiny hut to shelter himself from wind and storm and he had made the door strong; so, after many years of uselessness, it did its part now to help the three runaways to outwit the gale that seemed determined to break in. But after a few minutes the fury of the storm ceased. One or two sobs of defeated anger, and then a great calm.

"What is it going to do?" whispered little Mary fearfully. Before anyone could answer a sunbeam broke through a knothole in the roof.

"Clear off!" cried the Boy, just as if he, not the sunbeam, had discovered the fact. Then a cheerfulness took possession of the party. Since they were safe and sound, they might as well begin life and enjoy the adventure. They were soaked through and through.

"My bones even are soppy," gurgled little Mary.

"We must have a fire!" decided Meg. You stay here, Mary, and drip yourself out; Boy and I will get sticks."

They soon had a large pile, gathered from spots where the rain had not penetrated. The Boy, since he was a boy, had some matches in a pocket which had also escaped the deluge, and, before you would expect it, there was a brisk little fire on the odd little grate to cheer the small wanderers. Mary nestled down before it and spread her skirts to the grateful heat. "I've lost all —all the food," she wailed, only just realizing that her load was gone.

"Never mind!" comforted the Boy. "Meg and I have ours. It's dreadfully wet; we'll have to cook it again, but to-morrow I'm going hunting."

"What with?" asked Meg. She was putting all the watery mess in an old kettle she had found, and mixing it joyously.

"I'm going to make a bow and arrow!" proudly replied the Boy. Meg dropped her mess upon the dirty floor, scooped it up again, then said slowly, "You are a wonderful boy!" This solemn compliment made the Boy turn scarlet. Meg had never estimated him at his true worth before, and now that she did, it turned him giddy.

"I—I think that—cake—you are making" sniffed little Mary, with her nose in the air, "smells awfully smelly."

Well, it's ready to eat now," cried Meg, turning the unsightly concoction on the floor. "Let's eat real wild and fierce with our fingers."

"I—I am not hungry," quivered Mary, "I'm just full."

"I'm starved," said the Boy. It would never do to hurt Meg's feelings after the compliment, so he took a good slice of the blackened lump and ate it without a show of horror.

Meg would not be outdone by such bravery so she gulped the rest, then she said: "Let's go outside and—and watch the sunset! You go behind the house, Boy, I'll stay in front. Quick!" The Boy was only too ready to comply. Little Mary looked in wonderment. When she was alone with Meg she asked:

"Didn't you like your—cake, Meggie?

Don't ask so many questions! cried Meg, fiercely; "can't I look at the sunset without hating—my cake?"

After a while the Boy joined them and good nature came back, too.

The sunset was beautiful. The long day was going forth triumphant, and even the

three runaways were happier than they had any right to be.

"One good thing about a mountain," smiled the Boy from the lofty peaks of his manly knowledge, "night never comes there!"

This made the two girls stare.

"No, ma'am! night never comes. Down below it does, because you see the mountain hides the sun; up here, there is nothing in the way." The Boy waved his arms magnificently and looked hopefully at his two little draggled comrades. "When I get rich," he went on, changing the subject, "I'll buy you some new clothes."

"What is it doing now?" little Mary suddenly broke in; "it looks exactly as if the sun was going down behind—behind nothing!"

It certainly did, and the Boy had a sensation of defeat that turned his freckled face crimson.

"Let's go inside and shut the door tight

and tell stories!" exclaimed Meg, loyally putting herself between the Boy and darkening hopes.

"Let's!" cried the Boy and Mary. And you should have seen the look on the Boy's face. The fire had dwindled to a very little fire and inside the hut a dimness brooded over the gloomy place. Several lips trembled, but no one was there to tell the tale.

"Since there isn't any bed," quivered Mary, trying to gather comfort from the cheerlessness, "nobody need ever go to bed, ever any more!"

"Let's tell stories—laughy ones," broke in Meg, striving to keep the flagging spirits of the party up.

The Boy braced to the occasion. "Let's tell one together," he said. "I'll begin, and when I point my finger at you, Meg, you go on."

"All right." This was a game of past and safer days.

"Once upon a time there were two ladies

and a big, brave man went to live on a high mountain."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Meg. The Boy frowned.

"What you laughing at?" he said.

"Isn't this a laughy story?" Meg grew sober.

"This part isn't," scowled the Boy. "I guess you'll know when it is funny. These people were awfully brave. There wasn't a thing that scared them. Bears—"

"Oh!" shuddered little Mary, gripping Meg, "go on, Boy, I'm not frightened. I'm—I'm only enjoying myself."

"Bears—or snakes."

"Don't move your foot that way again, Mary Farley!" Meg had sprung to her feet; "it did not frighten me, but—but—you might burn your shoe!"

The fire was starting up comfortingly and they all nestled closer around it. The Boy began again:

"The big brave man built a great castle

on the top of the mountain, and when it was finished he stood on the—on the turret and yelled, 'Come one and all, I defy you!' "

"What did he do that silly thing for?" asked Meg; "it was just attracting people!"

"'Course!" answered the Boy, "he wanted his enemies to—to bear down upon him, and the—the two ladies, just to show how brave they were!"

"I wish he—he had tended to his own affairs!" snapped Meg, "somebody always gets hurt when a castle is attacked. There are better ways than that of showing how brave you are."

"What?" asked the Boy, pointing a grimy finger at Meg. Before she could answer a loud thump upon the door caused them all to spring to their feet and cling together.

Again the knock was repeated, and then a loud voice cried: "Open, good folks, it is only a tired man!"

"Good folks" touched the pride of the three inside. The Boy tried to disentangle himself from his clinging companions, but they struggled to hold him.

"P'r'aps it's one of your enemies coming to attack you!" hoarsely whispered Meg, getting the real and the unreal confused.

"P'r'aps it's the Sand Man!" breathed little Mary, and there was comfort in the thought. At that the hands relaxed; the Boy took courage and called out:

"Come in, sir!" Slowly the door swung open and, out from the dark and coolness, came a tall brown man with a bag slung over his shoulder. Of course, it was the Sand Man! There was no doubt about it and Mary rose to the occasion. She freed herself from her comrades, and going up to the stranger, extended her pretty, dimpled hand.

"How do you do?" she said sweetly; "do you know I have been waiting to see you for years and years?"

A TALL MAN WITH A BAG SLUNG OVER HIS SHOULDER.

The Sand Man actually staggered back and simply stared.

"P'r'aps you expected to find us in bed—but you didn't."

"No—I didn't!" foolishly repeated the man. Then he looked at the Boy and Meg, and said, slowly, "Jiminy crickets! Where are your folks?"

This was a pointed question, and after a pause Meg concluded that it was wiser to take the visitor into their confidence.

"We've run away!" she said, slowly. We're going to stay here and—and start a city!" She confused again the real with the recent story.

"Oh! you be, be you?" nodded the man. Then he threw his bag on the floor, and, quite in friendly fashion, joined the group by the fire.

Mary was charmed with the Sand Man, and sat close by his elbow. The stranger showed great tact. He meant to find out everything about this odd

little group, but, he was too wise to appear eager.

"I ran away myself once," he began, "ran to sea."

This touched the Boy deeply.

"Tell us!" he begged; "tell us about it." So the man began:

"Things didn't seem just what I wanted around home—so I went! I reckon I did not think how my folks felt when I went." Meg blinked hard, and Mary edged nearer to her. "It's them as don't run away as feels the worse," the man went on. "Well, I sailed the raging billows a considerable time before I found out that you can't have everything you want anywhere, and home—is pretty good."

"Tell us some adventures," broke in the Boy, who was suspicious of the man's way of beginning. Beside, it made him feel queer, and little Mary had tears in her eyes. So the man told several merry, exciting tales, and then he opened his bag

and took out some good, clean biscuits and a bottle of sweet milk, and treated the company.

"Been here long?" he asked, at length.

"Not very," replied the Boy, cautiously. Then he added, quickly: "While you were on the raging billows, did you ever happen to meet Nancy Lee's boy?"

This question had the oddest effect upon the man. He dropped the bottle of milk he was raising to his lips, and even his brown face looked pale.

"Yes," he whispered, at last. "I knew him. Is—is—Nancy Lee a-a-living?"

"Of course," laughed the Boy, importantly; "she lives between Meg's house and mine. I chop all her wood—now! And Meg takes milk to her every once in a while. She makes splendid cookies."

The man passed his rough hand across his face.

"Have you got sand in your eyes?" asked Mary sympathetically. She had

some in her own—or at least she had something which smarted, and it made her very tender.

"Yes, missy," said the man, "my eyes have been full of sand for many a year, but it's getting out, now." Then he turned to the Boy. "I suppose you couldn't be hired to leave your city, and act as guide to—to Nancy Lee's? You see, I'd make it worth your while, and you could come back and begin building to-morrow, if you wanted to!"

"If he goes, we're going, too!" Meg sprang up wildly. Here was a possible chance without disgrace; and she snatched at it.

"Certainly, miss," nodded the stranger; "I could carry little missy, take you by the hand, and the lad could lead the way. I only want you to show me Nancy Lee's house, then I'll go, and you can come back here. I have a message for Nancy from—from—her boy!"

This settled it. The Boy arose promptly. "I'll do it!" he cried in a loud, bold voice; and then they all arose.

The Sand Man flung his bag over his back, lifted little Mary to his strong shoulder; grasped Meg's only too willing hand, and, led by the Boy, the party sallied out.

The dark had changed things wonderfully. The Boy felt most humble as he realized that he could not find any way, let alone the right way.

"It's in this direction," said the man from out the gloom; and he went before. Soon the silent company came to an opening in the woods, and below them they saw twinkling lights that meant houses! They all knew that. Then the way was easier. Down, down they went, and the lower they went the higher their spirits rose.

Presently little Mary cried from her lookout.

"Oh, me, and oh, my! if here isn't a

house coming right up to us!" The party stood still. Then long calls echoed from tree to tree:

"Mary—lit—tle—Mary!"

"Margaret—Margaret my lass!"

"Boy! Boy! Boy!"

One call followed the other, and trouble was in every call.

"It's my daddy!" sobbed Mary from up aloft, "my own daddy!"

"It's father!" groaned Meg in an awed tone "he—and he is sad!"

"We're coming! we're coming!" yelled the Boy in an ecstasy of relief, "here we are!"

Sure enough, there everybody was. The jolly father was not jolly for a full moment; not until he had little Mary in his own arms. Meg's father knelt right down among the leaves and clung to his little lass, while he whispered:

"God be praised! You are safe."

And the Boy's father had him in his

arms, and even the Boy was not ashamed when has father kissed him.

There were a good many other men standing about with torches, and at first they did not say much, but after a while they began to make remarks and give advice which nobody heeded. Finally Mary's father spoke to the big, silent fellow who had carried his little girl.

"You found these children?" he asked; "how can we repay you?"

"There is only one way, sir," laughed the man, and the torches showed his brown face all aglow, "and the youngsters have the job. We all are runaways, sir, we are all alike, and they promised to guide me to Nancy Lee's cottage."

Meg's father gave a jump. Before he could speak, though, the Boy shouted, "Why, here is Nancy's cottage, right near. See, the light in the window; that's for her boy!"

The big man staggered forward, but be-

fore he could knock on the little door Nancy, who had heard the noise outside, opened it, and, raising the lamp high above her head, looked out. The big man took the lamp from her, put one arm around her, and drew her inside. Then the door closed after them—and the three other runaways were led back to their homes!"

Grandma Travers stopped, and for a long time no one spoke. Then Betty rubbed her eyes.

"I feel as if I could not get back to now," she sighed gently. "I feel just as if I were there to stay."

"Did it really all happen to the long ago—Meg and Mary and Boy?" asked Margaret, solemnly.

"Yes, dear," nodded grandmother. "Occasionally such things do happen in really, truly stories."

"And—and—was it Nancy Lee's own boy?"

"Yes, dear, her own boy. And he made her very happy. He took beautiful care of her and built her a cozy little home at the Corners, where they lived happily to the—very end. And the son of Nancy Lee loved the Boy and Meg and little Mary always; but I think he loved the Boy the best of all."

"On account of the wood chopping?" asked Betty.

"Yes, and other things. He gave the Boy his compass and told him to always sail true."

"Was the compass something like the one grandfather has in his den?" said Margaret.

"Very much," laughed grandma.

"Come and see mine!" called Grandpa Travers from the hall, "and I tell you it has always guided me true!"

CHAPTER X.

A HAPPY ENDING.

GREAT things had happened and greater ones were to happen. From Grandpa Travers down to Tiger, the wolfhound, Sunny Acres was all a-quiver. A letter had come from over the sea. The dear father and mother were coming home and they were going to bring a strange lady with them!

"We found her in Venice," mother had written, "she did not expect to return to America so soon, but after I told her all about you she said she must travel back with us. She is very lonely, but I think she is never going to be alone or sad any more. She said with such a sunny little smile through her tears, 'I have no one of my

very own any more. Only a lot of useless money, and time.' So I told her I would share you all with her forever after and she is coming with us!"

Now can you wonder that everyone was in a flutter?

Such preparations as there were. It was like Christmas, Thanksgiving, all the birthdays and Fourth of July in one. But do you think Margaret and Betty forgot long ago Meg? Not a bit of it!

It was the night before—you know before what—and again Grandma Travers had her pair of travelers bound for the "Long Ago."

"I just know you are going to end them all up," sighed Margaret; "of course I must know it all! but I do not see how I can live without Meg and little Mary."

"And the Boy," put in Betty, loyally. Grandma nodded.

"The Boy, certainly," she laughed. "Meg could not have existed without the

Boy, I fancy. Well, the runaways were all gathered home and no one scolded them."

Even Grandma Thompson hugged Meg, and said gently to Meg's mother, "To-morrow we must find out why they wanted to run away." That showed that Grandma Thompson was very wise, and perhaps it accounted for a good deal. So, to-morrow they found out, and Mary's father and mother found out, and the Boy's father and mother found out, and then the grown-ups had a long talk together at Meg's house. And what do you think Meg heard? Why, little Mary's father had a plan that fitted everything together like a perfect puzzle. If the Boy must go to boarding school, why, right near Mary's home in the big city was the very school for him. Mary's own papa had gone there—and see what he had become! Then it was time that Meg should go to school. Meg's father said it surely was—but where?

And then the jolly father replied that there was an empty seat beside little Mary's own in the city school, and Mary needed just such a sister as Meg. At that, Meg's mother gave a little sob, but Grandma Thompson said :

"Think of such a chance for the child!" And then Meg's mother said, bravely, "Of course."

Just then Meg looked at her mother and she saw and knew how her mother loved her.

"I—I can't leave you, mother," she cried, and ran into her mother's arms, which were open for her. "Yes; you can be brave for me, as I shall be for you, child," whispered Meg's mother; "you will do what is right—for father and mother!"

"And Boy shall spend from Friday to Monday with us every week!" cried the jolly father. And somehow that gave Meg new strength.

So it was all arranged, and one golden October morning the city-bound party drove away. The Boy was in his fittest suit, and the compass, which was to guide him true, was hugged to his breast. It helped to keep the queer feeling down. Meg was in her red Sunday dress, but even that could not keep the queer feeling down in her heart. She gripped little Mary and that was all that helped. Little Mary, as you may guess, had only happy feelings in her heart, so she sang the merriest song and that song stayed long after the carriage load had turned the bend in the road.

> We're coming back when summer comes;
> Oh, won't we all be glad?
> Let's think of that, and then, you see,
> We never need be sad.

Oh! that is what sweet little Mary sang. It was a magic song; every one who heard it felt a joy rising over everything else. Then the carriage drove past the Corners,

and there were Nancy Lee and her boy and dear Father McNamara waiting to wave a loving good-by. Mary had to sing very loudly again as they drove away from that group. But again the magic song had its way.

And then—and then—why school, and more happy years full of busy winters, and glorious summers; and then the Boy was in college and Meg with her head full of many things, went back to them who loved her; and waited every summer for little Mary—and that is all!

Grandma Travers paused. There were tears in her eyes—happy tears, and Margaret and Betty gave a suspicious little sniff apiece.

"I cannot let them go!" tragically cried Margaret, "I want them always!"

"So do I!" broke in Betty, "I love them just like real folk. Please, grandma, tell us now what was Boy's name?"

"His name was John, dear," said grandma, very gently.

"And his last name?" cried Margaret, while her eyes danced with a new and happy hope.

"Travers, my little girl, John Travers!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" shouted Margaret and Betty, together, as the truth dawned upon them, "and you are Meg, you blessed grandmother. You are ours to keep for always and always!" Four little arms were about grandma, and kisses covered her face. But after a while Betty stopped to say:

"And little Mary, was she really and truly?"

"Yes, Betty darling, and she is coming to-morrow with your father and mother. Dear little Mary, has not always had joy, but her sunny heart has brightened her way. She's a very beautiful old lady—a bit lonely now—and you must love her."

"Love her?" said Margaret, "why, we adore her! Just think, you all belong to

us!" At that moment Betty darted to the door. "Boy!" she called until the house rang with the shout. "Boy, we have found you out!" And then from out the den came Grandfather Travers, with the compass in his hand.

"See if it will guide me true," he laughed. And it really did. It guided him right to grandma, and he kissed her and said such a pretty thing: "You are the north star, dear; it points to you, and you are always, always true."

THE END.